

Sri Ram Raksha Stotra

Understanding the 'Sri Ram Raksha Stotra' and its hidden mysteries, stories and magic



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Annotated Sanskrit-English Dictionary of Sri Ram Raksha Stotra – Part 1

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Sri Ram Raksha Stotra

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Sri Budha Kousika Rishi

Sri Budha Kousika Rishi wrote the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra. Who was he? For those who may know, the identity of Sri Budha Kousika Rishi may be very obvious. For many, it is not. The obvious answer is that he was a Sage – i.e., a *rishi*. He was extremely learned and talented. The Sri Ram Raksha Stotra is composed in the Anushtup Chanda, in the metre of a specific combination of numbers. The usual answer, however, is that Sri Budha Kousika Rishi was the great Brahmarishi Vishwamitra.

I have not found the correct answer, and I feel I should say so. Why do I hesitate to accept that Brahmarishi Vishwamitra could be the author? This is because Vishwamitra was already recognized as a Brahmarishi, many hundreds of years earlier, when he met Dasharath to ask him to allow Ram to accompany him. He was not recognized or mentioned as Kousika Rishi during and after his association with Ram. The identity of Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, the author of the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra, is a mystery.

It is said, in the Stotra, that Shiva appeared to Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, in his dream, and recited the entire Sri Rama Raksha Stotra to him. At dawn, the next day, Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, penned down the entire Sri Rama Raksha Stotra.

There could be four theories. The most recounted and repeated theory is that Sri Budha Kousika Rishi is nobody other than Brahmarishi Vishwamitra himself. I am very tempted to believe it. This theory is on the basis of the fact that he was the King Kousika, and later, the Kousika Rishi, before he was recognized as the Brahmarishi Vishwamitra.

The second theory is that the 'Kousika' gotra began with Brahmarishi Vishwamitra, since he was the King Kousika, and later the Kousika Rishi. Thus, a later Rishi, of the 'Kousika' gotra, and with the prefix, Budha, being the name of the Planet Jupiter in Sanskrit, has written the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra, after the appearance of Shiva in his dreams.

The third theory is that there could have been an entirely different rishi, unconnected and unrelated to Brahmarishi Vishwamitra, or to the 'Kousika' gotra. He could have existed, in some other time period, and he could have written the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra. If this were to be true, then indeed, the identity and story of Sri Budha Kousika Rishi would be an absolute riddle.

The fourth theory is that a rishi named 'Budha', in Brahmarishi Vishwamitra's ashrama, could have been recognized as a 'Kousika Rishi'. He could have been known as such, because he was one of the rishis in the ashram of 'Kousika', i.e., Vishwamitra. This rishi could have been later recognized through his signature title in the stotra, as 'Budha Kousika Rishi'.

It is written, that, in ancient times, the sages in an ashram, the pupils of a teacher or guru in a gurukul ashram, or the descendants of an important sage, could also inherit the 'gotra' or clan name of the master. It is also known that certain important sages also gave rise to new clan lines, or 'gotras' that were named after them. This is true of the sages who had manifested as the sons born from Brahma, the Creator. In contemporary times, the 'gotra' is usually referred to for arranging marriages between two different clans. That, of course, is a different story.

The seven of the most important *rishis* of those times are (1) Gautama, (2) Bharadwaja, (3) Vishwamitra, (4) Jamadagni, (5) Vasishta, (6) Kashyapa, and (7) Atri. It is later mentioned that Kousika was a descendant of the great Brahmarishi Vishwamitra. Similarly, Kaundinya was a descendant of the great sage Vasishta, and Vatsa was descended from the great sage Jamadagni.

Why could the author be Brahmarishi Vishwamitra? First reason, of course, Vishwamitra knew Ram. He knew him better than anyone else, perhaps better than his father, Dasharatha, or even his brother, Lakshmana. He knew Ram, before Sita or Hanuman became inseparable aspects of his life. He knew the

abilities of Ram, and knew exactly about the aspect of the manifestation of Vishnu, and of the aspect that he had descended in a human avatar, solely for the purpose of the decimation of Ravana and the Rakshasas.

If anyone could describe Ram, in relative perspective to every aspect of his being, behaviour and of his very existence, and ascribe powers to these aspects, it could be none other than Brahmarishi Vishwamitra. But, if the great Brahmarishi did in fact write down the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra, why did he not sign it by the name of Vishwamitra? That indeed, is a mystery. The other contemporary sages, including the first seven, have signed their own names to the works ascribed to them.

Second, is because of the one line that almost gives away his identity – *“Hridayam Jaamadagnyajit”* – *“The one who conquered the son of Jamadagni, please protect my heart”*. Vishwamitra and Parashurama, the son of Jamadagni, never got along. They hated each other and were in perpetual mistrust of each other. None other than Brahmarishi Vishwamitra could be more pleased by the fact that Ram defeated Parashurama, and would therefore ascribe the aspect that such a conqueror could indeed protect the ‘heart’.

There are two disturbing lines that make me wonder, if Brahmarishi Vishwamitra may not be the Budha Kousika Rishi, the author of the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra. One is in praise to Vishwamitra, and would the great sage have given such value to himself? The other line is in attribution to the story line of another great hero in India’s mythology that may not have occurred in the Ramayana, but is to be found in the stories of Krishna, after the Kurukshetra war. Would the Brahmarishi have stretched the context to such an extent? Or, am I missing something here?

The line in praise to the great sage is – *“Vishwamitra priya shrutee”* – *“Rama, who is dear to Vishwamitra, protect my ears”*. This line makes me doubt, for that very brief moment, if the great Brahmarishi Vishwamitra would appreciate and write about himself? To those who know the story of Vishwamitra, it would be very tempting to say that the great sage would indeed write about himself and ascribe such affection to Ram. Here, I beg to differ. If he would indeed write about his affection to Ram, he could have written about the friendship in more lines, rather than limit it to only one half of the metre.

The other line that strengthens the doubt is – *“Naabhim Jambavadaashraya”* – *“Rama, who gave refuge to Jambavan, protect my navel”*. Again, there

is this very brief doubt. The story of Jambavan, and his presence in the Ramayana, is much later to Sugreeva, Hanuman, Vaali, Angad and the other *vanaras*. Jambavan, is depicted, as a bear-man. Rama gives refuge to Jambavan, who swears allegiance in the war to come with Ravana. Rama did give refuge, but in those moments of the Ramayana, he gave support and courage to all those who approached him. It is much later, after the Kurukshetra war that Jambavan reappears in the story of Satyakam and Sri Krishna. The refuge sought by Jambavan from Sri Krishna is certainly more emphatic.

Was there an entirely unknown rishi, by the name, Budha Kousika Rishi? Why would Shiva come to him in his dreams and why would he be asked to write the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra? Who was this great rishi, who penned the Stotra with such precision in accurate metre. Not many realize that the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra is written in the same metre as the Ramayana. Was it indeed difficult in those times to write the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra in such precision? It may not have been, for the great sages composed several stotras during those times, and their authorship is included in the earlier couplets.

I am tempted to agree to the premise that the Brahmarishi Vishwamitra was indeed the author of the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra, after he received the instructions from Shiva. Why? It is not because of the precision of the composition, but it is in the affection, love, the entire surrender to Ram, by one who had already achieved perfection. The great sage, returned to urban areas, to the Royal Court, after nearly two hundred years of residing in the remote forests, to seek Ram, to take it upon him to train Ram, and to insist upon it, and to argue with Dasharath to allow it to happen.

The author, Budha Kousika Rishi, explains that he was commanded in his dream, *“Aadhishtavan yathaa swapne”*, to write the Ram Raksha Stotra, *“Ram raksha mimaam haraha”*, and he wrote it out in the morning, *“Tathaa likhit vaana praataha”*, as told to Budha Kousika by Shiva, *“Prabhu-dho Budha Kousikah”*. That indeed, is an author, who gave the Ram Raksha Stotra to millions of devotees of Ram, and caused them to be blessed, and will do so in the future.

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Anushtup Chanda

Sri Budha Kousika Rishi has written the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra in the Anushtup Chanda, or the Anushtup metre. The great sage-poet, Valmiki, had also composed the Ramayana in the same metre, the Anushtup Chanda. This much is known, for it is said so, at the beginning of the stotra – *Sri Sitaramachandro Devata | Anushtup Chanda | Seeta Shakti | Srimad Hanumana Keelakam* | - The deity of this stotra is Sri Ram, the metre is Anushtup, the power of the stotra is from Sita, and Sri Hanuman is the lynchpin (*nail*) that keeps the verses and the entire stotra together and gives it the magnificence of devotion that only he can.

We will not discuss or argue the timeline or the possible time-period of the Ramayana. What is most certainly known, without argument, is that the great sage-poet, Valmiki, wrote the Ramayana in the Anushtup Chanda, or metre. He is credited with the discovery of the verse-metre that was named '*Anushtup*'. He wrote the Ramayana in verse-form through nearly 24,000 verses, divided amongst seven books that are recognized as *Kaandas*. To illustrate the use of a specific metre, through an entire stotra, is the *Gayatri Chanda*, or metre, for the Gayatri Mantra, composed by Brahmarishi Vishwamitra. Later, Veda Vyasa included the mantra in the Vedas.

There are other authors and poets who have written the Ramayana in variant versions, including those that are written in other countries of South and South-East Asia. Some of these variant metres have the entire Ramayana beginning and concluding within those nations, without any trace or hint that the story could have taken place in India. The diversity can be discussed by a million other webpages, blogs, network groups and experts.

The great variants in India of the Ramayana by the Eleventh Century Tamil Poet, Kamban, and by the Sixteenth Century Hindi-Hindustani Poet, Tulsidas, through his *Ramacharitamanas*, have been recognized as distinctly different depictions.

The story of Valmiki discovering the Anushtup Chanda metre of poetry is in itself extremely fascinating, especially because of the romanticisation of the love of the *Krauncha* birds and their subsequent sorrow. The death of one of the birds caused the sage, Valmiki, to exclaim in verse, that he later realized was in a proper metre, and was accepted and recognized as the *Anushtup*.

The verses in Anushtup metre were grouped into chapters that were termed as *Sarga*, that were later compiled within a *Kaanda*. Interestingly, the word *Kaanda*, is usually meant to depict the internode point of sugarcane, and in ancient Sanskrit, was used to depict an interlude within a story. Valmiki's Ramayana, now recognized as the *Srimad Valmiki Ramayan*, is organized into six *Kaandas* or Books. There is a seventh *Kaanda*, and its inclusion is a different story and a different argument elsewhere.

The Anushtup metre is comprised of 32 syllables in one verse. Each *sloka*, or a para within the poem, is usually comprised of four lines, and sometimes more. Uniquely, the sage-poet, Valmiki, seemed to have confirmed to most of the rules of Sanskrit Grammar, that must have been defined much later. The Ram Raksha Stotra is also similarly constructed, in precise Anushtup metre, with 32 syllables in four lines of the verse.

Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, as did Valmiki, did not stray from the rules that would later be written to depict the system governing the structural and functional relationships of the verse, following its earlier verse, and subsequently leading to the compilation of the entire Sri Ram Raksha Stotra. There is extremely complex interplay of word components, mostly of course, with the word 'Ram', which is to be expected. There is also complex organization of the morphology and syntax of the series of words within each metre.

It would be obvious to those who have memorized the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra, and those who are able to recite the entire Stotra in loud chanting, with rhythm, that the phonology of the verse following verse, is very simple, once you have been able to internalize the entire series. This simplicity of the phonology of the Stotra, in juxtaposition to the complex nature of its morphology, is what makes the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra so very amazing, and makes one respect the genius of these great sage-poets, such as Valmiki and Budha Kousika Rishi.

Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, the most definitive treatise on Sanskrit Grammar, was also composed or written, possibly after Valmiki would have written the Ramayana. Did Sanskrit Grammar get defined because of the Ramayana of Valmiki? It would be interesting to determine, and more interesting to be proved wrong. A lesser-known fact to those who are not familiar with Sanskrit Grammar is that Panini's

definitive *Ashtadhyayi* was also written in the *sloka* format, and was completed in a precise 1000 *slokas*. Compare this to the Ramayana, in 24,000 verses.

Sanskrit grammar explains and defines the *Sandhi*, the rules and context and variations of combinations of two words, such as *Surya* (= Sun) + *Udhayam* (= Sunrise) = *Suryodham*. There could be many variants in combining two words. Similarly, there could be variants of *vibhakti* or declensions, in the combination of two words. A declension is when a noun changes its form when it changes its number or its case. This can also be similarly noticed in the conjugation of verbs. These are however, finite.

In contrast, there are other variants, where *avyayas* or indeclinables are used. This is particularly noticed when words that refuse to merge with each other, are brought together. Thus, there could be combinations of using *vibhakti* and *avyaya* within the same line of a verse. This is where it gets complex, when one has to compose in the Anushtup chanda. How do you use the same word, for e.g., Ram, because the verse is in devotion to Sri Ram, and evoke diverse aspects of *bhakti* (= sublime devotion), and yet use only 32 syllables and not deviate from the metre?

This is the genius of Budha Kousika Rishi in the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra. For centuries, devotees of Ram, be they Hindus, or from any other religion, have been reciting the Stotra. Those who have memorized the Stotra, and those who chant it out loud, and those who teach the words to younger generations, have fallen in love again and again with the words and the images that they invoke. This magic has been made possible by the awesome interplay of rules of grammar within the Anushtup Chanda.

The final verse, when written, is recognized by the foremost of Sanskrit grammarians, as achievement of *rupasiddhi* (= attainment of form). Authoritative Sanskrit grammar texts recognize the achievement of Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, in writing the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra, as the depiction of his mastery of Sanskrit grammar. They accept that the complex structure of the 32 syllables in Anushtup metre, helps the devotee to memorise the complicated *vibhakti* forms, and the common *bhakta* does not need to learn Sanskrit grammar to internalize the stotra.

This is especially true in the most amazing verse of the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra, and can be the most illustrative example of the completeness of the 32-syllable structure of each verse through the magic of Sri Budha Kousika Rishi in Anushtup Chanda. This verse has been made an example to depict the magic

and excellence of the Stotra in texts that explain Sanskrit grammar.

*Ramo rajamanih sada vijayate,
Ramam ramesam bhaje, |
Ramenabhihata nisacaracam,
Ramaya tasmai namah ||*

I would also propose the following verse-line to present the magic of Sri Budha Kousika Rishi. The *padama* (first), *dwitiya* (second), *tritiya* (third) and *chatuspaada* (fourth) lines depict awesome word play that could not be more beautiful, more evocative and more sublime.

*Rama rame rameti,
rame rame manorame |
Sahasra naama tatulyam,
rama naama varanane ||*

Can there be any other verse that can be better? Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, ascribes these two lines to Shiva, in explaining to Parvati, that he, himself (= *varanane*), recites the words, 'Rama, Rama, Rama' within his mind, and the recitation delights him (= *manorame*), and that, he takes pleasure in visiting the places where Rama has been (= *rameti*). For, as Shiva explains, the recitation of the word 'Rama' is equal to the recitation of the word 'Vishnu', for a thousand times (= *sahasra*).

All our modern-day software programmers may put their minds together, and discover and invent the best algorithms, and develop a method of writing in the 32-syllable Anushtup metre of verse. This may be possible in the world of the future. However, nobody will be able to write more sublimely, to establish the best of devotion, as has been written by Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, in Anushtup chanda, when he writes these two verse-lines, and yet, be extremely evocative. They are presented in variant contexts in the Stotra.

*Rameti ramabadreti,
ramachandreti va smarana |
Naro na lipyate paapai,
bhuktim muktim cha vindate ||*

The one who will constantly recite the words – Ram, Ramachandra or Ramabhadra will never be trapped in sinful acts. That person will always enjoy happiness and will acquire enlightenment (= *moksha, mukti*).

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Shiva, Parvati and Rama

Sri Budha Kousika Rishi presents the source of the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra, and reaffirms – *Adhishtavaana yathaa swapne*, - As told earlier (= *Aadhi*), in his dreams, - *Ramarakshaam mimaam hara*, - Shiva (= Hara), recounted the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra, and, - *Tatha likhita vaana prathahaa* – was written as told, exactly, by the sage, in the early dawn (= *prathahaa*), - *prabhudhdho budha kousika* – in homage to the lord, by Budha Kousika.

It is thus written that Sri Budha Kousika Rishi dreamt of Shiva reciting the entire series of verses, and later, at dawn, the sage wrote the entire Sri Ram Raksha Stotra. Why would Shiva recite the stotra to present aspects of Ram that would help people seek succour and support in times of distress? What were the aspects of Ram that Shiva needed to inform people about that were not already specified in the Ramayana?

The beginning is, of course, at the beginning. Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma are the trinity. Different Puranas present the importance, sequence and relevance of the three deities in different ways. The Shiva Purana depicts Shiva as foremost, and similarly, the Vishnu Purana presents Vishnu as the earliest. Once we are past the beginning of the beginning, the unity of Hari and Hara is depicted through various stories in several Puranas and Itihasas, including the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Skanda Purana, among others. The aspect of *Ardhanaarishwara*, the half-man and half-woman, when Shiva and Shakti came together to present themselves as one individual, is most certainly an entirely fascinating story, but is to be retold elsewhere.

Later, i.e., after the beginning, is the *Adhyaatma Ramayana*, supposed to have been composed through the manner of telling the story of Rama by Shiva to Parvati. The recounting is datelined to be hundreds or thousands of years before the *Valmiki Ramayana*. The story of composing the *Adhyaatma Ramayana* needs to be told here, in brief, to help us understand the clear visualization that Shiva developed about Rama. At one point, Shiva says that there cannot be Hari without Hara, or Maheshwara.

Later, after the recounting of the story, it is said that Parvati was extremely enamoured with the characters of Rama, Sita and Hanuman, and she desired that Shiva would cause for the events to happen. She also

wished that the story be written in specific verse, while the characters would be alive. Thereby, does Shiva recount the story to the wandering sage Narada and cause him to meet the sage-poet Valmiki and create the situation for the Ramayana to be known, through his pen, through the Anushtup Chanda, the 32-syllable metre.

We will not explore the various schools of thought that would believe or disbelieve, ascribe or not allow it to be accepted that Shiva conjured up the story, through the *Adhyaatma Ramayana*, and then caused for the tale to actually take place. This is indeed fascinating, extremely fascinating. But, it does help us understand that it could only have been someone as complex as Shiva, who could bring together the tremendous aspects of Rama, and cause it to be written, through the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra.

The *Bhaktamala*, and the *Bhakti Premakara*, are illustrations of Shiva's *bhakti*, devotion, to Rama. There is a situation during the actual course of events of the Ramayana, when Rama is in exile, with Sita and Lakshmana that needs to be discussed here in perspective of the triangulation of Shiva, Parvati and Rama. Some stories ascribe the triangulation to begin with Sati, while some ascribe it to Parvati.

Sati or Parvati, has this niggling doubt, ascribed by the *Bhaktamala*, to almost sacrilege, for she dared to doubt the actuality and purpose of the Rama Avatara, or, perhaps, that she could have been in delusion. The *Bhaktamala* supposes Shiva's consort, during these interactions, to be Sati, and therefore, much earlier than Parvati. Let others debate it.

She wondered about the aspect that, if Rama was indeed an Avatar of Vishnu, and was all that was supreme in the Universe, why would he accept his father's orders, and go ahead to live out fourteen years in exile in the forests? Shiva warned Sati to avoid deliberating such thoughts, but then, that gave rise to rebellion. Sati left Kailasa to test Rama by herself, to determine, if indeed he was the supreme *manu*, as Shiva accepted him to be, and drowned himself in devotion, reciting '*Rama, Rama, Rama*'.

Shiva cautioned Sati against testing Rama and the aspects of his divinity. Sati went ahead to the forest where Rama was in exile, and took upon herself the appearance of Sita. For Rama, however, the aspect of

Sati or Parvati, as Shiva's consort, was very obvious, and he could recognize her. He did not speak to her, and Sati, disappointed, returned to Kailasa. Shiva is described as a saddened spouse, in the fact that Sati did not believe him about the divinity of Rama, and the aspect of him being absolute supreme.

It is said, that in modern day Kangra, ages ago, Shiva and Parvati, traveled through, seated on Nandi, their great white bull, their *vaahana*. At one particular location, Shiva alighted and presented his prayers. On being questioned by Parvati, he said that this was a place where there dwelt a *bhakta*, devotee, of Rama, and there would be none other like him for another 10,000 years. And since, Parvati's appreciation of the *bhaktas* of Rama has always increased.

Much later, Shiva explains to Parvati the tremendous scope of the divinity of Rama. Tulsidas writes that, in similar manner of that of Sri Krishna declaring that he would always descend to save the world from disaster, so does Shiva explain the responsibility of Rama in saving his *bhaktas* and destroying evil. Tulsidas writes, in the *Ramcharitmanas*, through these amazing lines in verse –

*Hari guna naam apara,
Katharupa aganita amita,
Main nija mati anusara,
Kahaum Uma sadara sunahu.*

Shiva explains to Parvati, that the names of Rama (= *Hari*) are without number, and the stories and avatars or manifestations cannot be counted. Shiva says that he would try, to the best of his ability, to tell the story of Rama, to Parvati, or Uma. And, he requests her to listen, with respect to the divinity. It is believed that this emphasis to Parvati, asking her to pay attention to the narration with respect, is to ensure that Sati's mistake in doubting Rama is not to be repeated. These micro-nuances are amazing.

There is the paradox of the devotion of Rama or Vishnu to Shiva that is also most delightful and tremendous in its depiction at various moments of the Ramayana. Who can ever forget the moment when Rama offers prayers to the Shiva Linga, at Rameswaram, prior to construction of the pathway across the sea to Lanka? The place is now recognized as one of the twelve *jiyotirlingas* of Shiva.

Once, Narada approaches Vishnu, and requests his guidance to ward off a curse that had been placed on the mendicant-sage. Vishnu advises Narada to meditate upon Shiva and is thus written –

*Japau Jai Sankara Sata Nama
Hoyhi Hridayam Turata Bisrama*

“Recite through chanting, the hundred names of Sankara, or Shiva, and obtain bliss in your mind.”

Narada questions, as to why would Vishnu want him to chant Shiva's name, and is advised that there is none dearer to Vishnu, than Shiva. Vishnu also emphasizes that he will not bless the one who is not blessed by Shiva. Tulsidas explains this significantly in the *Ramacharitmanas* –

*Siva seva kara phala suta soi,
Abirala bhagati Rama pada hoi.*

“Only those who pray or serve Shiva will have answers to their prayers to Rama. Further, since Rama himself is extremely devoted to Shiva, there is no need to explain further.”

The Ram Raksha Stotra has, in various verses, presented the devotion of Shiva to Rama, and of his understanding that reciting the word of ‘Rama’ is equal to several recitations of the different words of ‘Narayana’ or ‘Vishnu’.

There is another fascinating story of the manner in which the Ramayana was retold, and once again, Parvati questioned this aspect. Shiva informs Parvati that the Sage Kakabhushundi, also told the story of Ramayana to Vishnu's *vaahana*, Garuda. The sage had the body of a crow, and therefore, his name, ‘*Kakabhushundi*’. Parvati wondered about the fact that Garuda was extremely close to Vishnu, and was also an erudite scholar. Why did Garuda not know of the Ramayana from Vishnu?

Cursed by Shiva, the sage Kakabhushundi explained to Garuda that he could escape the damages by reciting the name of Rama, and that he had lived through twenty-seven *kalpas*, time-eras, chanting the name of Rama.

Shiva, as told to Budha Kousika Rishi, affirms that Rama is very dear to him, and more. Ram is his mother (*Maata Ramo*), maternal grandfather (*Matpita*), deity (*Swami Ramo*) and friend (*Mats*). He says that he is all forgiving (*Sarvasvam, Dayalu*), and he (Shiva) does not recognize any other deity or being, and has never done so, at any moment (*Rnaanyam jaane, naiva jaane na jaane*).

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Stotra, Mantra, Yantra, Tantra, Sastra, Sutra

At the earlier verses of the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra, the great sage-poet, Sri Budha Kousika Rishi informs very formally that the 'Sri Rama Raksha Stotra' is actually a 'Mantra'. He says –

Asya Sri Ramarakshastotra mantrasya /

So, is a 'stotra' actually a 'mantra'? If the divination was a 'mantra', why did Sri Budha Kousika Rishi classify the verses as a 'stotra'? Or, does the definition apply to 'stotra' and /or a 'mantra' without any significant difference?

Certain authors have attempted to clarify that the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra is a 'mantra in stotra avatar' –

“Stotra-roopi mantra”

Let us examine the other applications that the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra is linked to. There exists a Sri Rama Raksha Stotra Yantra, with a very specific Yantra-design in accurate geometric dimensions. Some practitioners and teachers have also believed that the healing powers of the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra are multiplied exponentially, when recited within a set of rituals. They do not very specifically relate the chanting and rituals to 'Tantra', but we should know and determine for ourselves. Is it good that it is not related to 'Tantra', or, does it not matter?

The dialogue between Shiva and Parvati, whereby the power, divinity and reasons for the Sri Ram Raksha Stotra is explained, is the medium for the explanation of several stotras, mantras, yantras, tantra and some sastras. There are several stories – *Puranas* – and related tales. They criss-cross diverse aspects of Shiva and Shakti. From Brahmarishi Vishwamitra's Gayatri Mantra to Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata and Srimad Bhagavatam, it is a tremendous journey across time in Hindu spiritual records and literature.

I do not like to refer to these valuable and most precious writings as mythology or stories. I think of them as the greatest of spiritual records of India, not merely of the Subcontinent, but of an ancient diaspora that extended from Central and West Asia to South, South East, East and Far East Asia.

The Sanskrit-English dictionary defines the 'stotra' as a hymn of praise. The hymn is usually in praise and appreciation of divinity, and within Hindu Thought,

the earliest stotras were in dedication to Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, Shakti or Saraswati, among other deities. Mostly, the word 'stotra' is alternatively used with the word 'stuti'. Unlike the complex Hindu scriptures, written in Sanskrit verse, for chapter after chapter, book after book, the stotra is always written in smaller series of verses.

In comparison to several stotras, the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra is smaller, with two sets of verses in prelude, followed by the remaining thirty-eight. Some renditions have a set of four verses that are chanted after the 38th, but that is rare. There are different versions of the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra, and some experts have claimed that they have come across more than 25 variants. These are difficult to track down, and I will try to do so, if they do exist.

There are two types of 'stotra' – One is the set of sequential verses or slokas, such as the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra. The other one is the rendition of several names of the deity, such as the narration of the 1000 names of Vishnu through the *Sri Vishnu Sahasranama*. This second form of the stotra is called the 'Sahasranama'. Sometimes, the names of the deity in the 'Stotra' can be located in the 'Sahasranama', and they are considered as important. Some important 'stotra' and 'sahasranama' are –

*Sri Vishnusahasranama Stotram
Sri Mahalakshmi Ashtakam
Sri Anjaneya Stotram
Sri Venkatesa Suprabhatam
Sri Venkatesa Ashottara Satanaamavali
Dasavataara Stotram*

Much can be written about the 'Yantra', and it would be easy to get diverted. I would like to focus on the 'Sri Rama Raksha Yantra', and present some salient aspects for experts and devotees to discuss.

The 'Yantra' is usually referred to the spiritual image being presented in a geometric design, and believed to contain powers to strengthen or destroy aspects, when prayers are presented in appropriate manner. It is usually advised to be extremely careful in working or praying or seeking help from a 'Yantra'.

The 'Yantra' is recognized as an instrument that can be used through prayers to control, limit or lend strength through its divinity. The geometrical designs

are different for diverse aspects of godliness, and the most preferred 'Yantra' is usually the 'Sri Yantra'. Most devotees are unaware of the manner of prayer, and the aspect of thought, that is normally regarded as superstition.

This much is true. Most aspects around the stotra, mantra, yantra, tantra, sastra and sutra are superstition drowned in coincidental events, retold through many different stories. One has to examine the beliefs in an appropriately rational manner. What is to be believed in? What is to be accepted? Who should be believed? What should not be accepted?

I would propose that you question everything. Do not accept anything if you do not accept the thought deep within you. There is a litmus test. Do not accept any of this, any aspect ascribed to spiritual strength and healing through the stotra, mantra, yantra, tantra, sutra or sastra, if told to you by another human being. Search for yourself. Do not get taken in by coincidence, or tales of the impact and effect that the prayers had on someone else.

You wish to pray, and you wish to pray to God. At that moment, do not worry if you are superstitious, or irrational. Go ahead and pray. Godliness, spiritual thought and prayer are certainly with extremely strong capital in emotional waves and vibrations. The prayer will definitely affect you. Let there be happiness within you. Stop at that point. Do not go and preach or discuss or explain or convince others to start praying or using the yantra or mantra or sutra. Let them do it on their own.

I wanted to emphasise and delink the prayer to superstition and acceptance of guidance from others, teachers, witchcraft practitioners and irrational gurus, regarding the use of 'yantra' or 'tantra'. Know for yourself. Search by yourself.

The 'Yantra' is usually a copper plate, with the geometrical design inscribed within it. The five elements of Air (*Vayu*), Water (*Jal*), Earth (*Pritvi*), Fire (*Agni*) and Sky (*Akash*) are represented within the design. Some designs are quadrilateral, while some are circular or triangular.

The Ram Raksha Yantra is believed to destroy evil and protect a person from all types of difficulties. There are various procedures to be followed while in prayer, with the Yantra, and one can easily learn about these methods from other sources.

Once again, to ask one and all to be careful, do not tread this path, unless you are determined to do so. This is an area where there are many who will take

advantage of people with problems and will convince one to resort to the 'Yantra' or 'Tantra' with promises of quick remedies. Do not do so.

The Sri Rama Raksha Stotra is purely a series of verses or slokas, presented in sequence, and is only meant for prayer to Ram. Nothing more, nothing less. Reciting, memorizing and chanting the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra has its own delightful charm and capture. Do not search for hidden purposes that are not meant to be within the 'stotra'. Enjoy the experience, and the thought.

The separation of the definitions of the 'Yantra' and the 'Mantra' will help resolve the significant difference. The 'Yantra' is regarded as a geometric representation of the 'body' of the deity. The 'Mantra' is recognized as the medium that allows the devotee to concentrate and focus all spiritual thought through the mere repetition of the 'slokas' and easy acceptance of the divinity being represented.

In its simplest understanding, again, to emphasise, at its simplest, 'Tantra' is to be recognized as the magical birth of knowledge, from pure thought. The divinity, Lalita Tripurasundari, is worshipped through the purest of 'Tantra' to represent the aspect of knowledge, in dual form. I will not digress here, for it would be easy. Let us merely appreciate the aspect of Shiva and Shakti, of the union of the two, and similarly wonder at the recognition that knowledge is born and established, only if there would be thought.

'Sutra', 'Stotra' and 'Sastra' are different terms, unlike the overlap between 'Stotra' and 'Mantra'. However, the 'Sutra' is commonly presented as 'Sutta' in Buddha's teachings and Mahavira's *Agamas*. The recognition of use is the same. Some schools of thought also present 'Sutra' as similar to the aspect of 'Gotra' but that is rare. The word 'Sastra' is, of course, meant to depict a school of science, such as, *Artha Sastra* (Economics) or *Neeti Sastra* (Politics).

The most appropriate example of a totally different stotra is the 'Dakshinamurti Stotra' as compared to the 'Sri Rama Raksha Stotra'. Meant to convey the aspect of Shiva, facing south (= *Dakshin*), the Dakshinamurti Stotra discusses the aspect of soul, existence, illusion, devotion and perfection. Unlike repeated chanting through prayer beads, the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra is purely meant to initiate the devotee to reaffirmation through prayer to Rama.

At Rama's paadukas

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Keelakam

The sage-poet Sri Budha Kousika Rishi writes in the introductory prelude ('*aadhyaay*') about the aspect of the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra. As discussed separately, he says that this is the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra in the form of a mantra (*Asya Sri Rama Raksha Stotra Mantrasya*), written by him, Budha Kousika Rishi, wherein the deity of the stotra is Shri Sitaram, i.e., Sita's Ram (*Sri Sitaramachandro Devata*).

The stotra is, as explained by the sage-poet, written in the Anushtup Chanda, and the power to the stotra is derived from Sita (*Sita Shaktih*), and that venerable Sri Hanuman is the crucial fulcrum in the form of the linchpin that holds the cartwheel (*Srimad Hanuman Keelakam*).

The linchpin is the very important and strategic large nail that holds the cartwheel in place on the central axle of a vehicle. It requires extraordinary strength, and one has to have absolute faith in its ability to provide the support for the journey. One knows that the linchpin will not betray the vehicle. The Sri Ram Raksha Stotra is your vehicle on your journey to Rama. The sage-poet recognizes Srimad Hanuman as the fulcrum who would give you the absolutely reliable strength in the journey.

The recognition of the status of the Keelakam is found in most mantras and stotras. Some naamavalis also include the recognition of a deity or an aspect as the Keelakam of the prayer. The mantra, or stotra, or other forms of prayer are accepted as different types of expressing or enabling devotion within oneself, i.e., *dhyaan*. Informing the devotee that the fulcrum is from a specific deity or aspect usually strengthens the *dhyaan* slokas and mantras.

There are other complex prayers that are known to be crucial in seeking the blessings of deities with multivariate aspects. The entire prayer in such examples are classified as '*Keelakam*' and are to be recited with the status thus provided – Devi Keelakam, Keelakam Stotram or the Vishnu Sahasranaama Keelakam.

The prayer to Devi, the '*Durga Saptasati*' is one of the most complex *dhyaana* stotras, comprising nearly 700 slokas. The entire sequence is made of different 'chapters', if one may term them as such. However, all the chapters comprising the entire range of 700 slokas are hinged on the earlier Keelakam Sloka,

being the fulcrum. The Durga Saptasati has a verse that is very commonly recited by most devotees in prayer, to Devi, but rarely does anyone place it in the sequence of the 700 slokas.

*Sarva mangala mangalye,
Sive sarvaartha saadike,
Sharanye tryambake Gowri,
Narayani namosthute*

The *Kavacham* (= Armour) *Sloka*, and the *Araghala Stotram* precede the Keelakam Sloka of the Durga Saptasati. Thirteen chapters follow the Keelakam Sloka, and the devotee is usually advised to recite the verses over an entire week. The *Katyayani* classification of the Durga Saptasati documents the structure of the 700 slokas.

The aspect of Srimad Hanuman as the Keelakam of the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra is almost mentioned as if in passing. But, the role of the fulcrum, being Hanuman, is depicted in perfection. Who could have been more appropriate than Hanuman when any devotee seeks out the blessings of Ram?

When one crosses over from the stotra to the aspects of tantra or mantra, the position of the Keelakam is extremely specific and elaborate. The Keelakam is not mentioned merely in passing, but placed in the sequence of prayer, with deliberate instructions to the devotee. This is true of the *Sri Sri Chandi*.

The Keelakam in the prayers and recitation of the *Sri Sri Chandi*, follows the (a) *Devi Suktam*, (b) *Kavacham*, and (c) *Araghala Stotram*, similar to the Durga Saptasati. The Keelakam is followed by the (d) *Ratri Suktam*, (e) *Devi Mahatmya*, (f) *Phala Sruti* and, (g) *Kshama Prarthana*. Rishi Markandeya has recited the Keelakam in sixteen slokas in this prayer.

All great mantras or stotras are recognized within two different purposes – (a) *Loukika mantra*, and (b) *Moksha mantra*. The *Loukika mantra* is composed to help the devotee to seek blessings from the deity to fulfill desires, while the *Moksha mantra* is meant to seek blessings to always be with God. Some prayers are intertwined with both purposes. Thus, when the great Dehu-Alandi-Pandharpur Waari takes place to coincide with Ashaad Ekadashi, and nearly 1.4 million devotees walk for more than 250 kms, they seek only one blessing, to be at one with Panduranga.

The great bhakti saints of Maharashtra helped the millions of devotees over the past four hundred years and more to reach 'moksha' with Panduranga, by merely reciting the very simple prayer of "Om Rama Krishna Hari". The saints, Tukaram and Jnaneshwar, simplified the journey by clarifying that the devotee need not remember or recite complex mantras, stotras or prayers, or seek sanctuary from witch-craft or from spiritual con artists. They taught that the fulcrum or Keelakam of the prayers of the devotees is in just being at one with Panduranga and by repeatedly reciting 'Om Rama Krishna Hari'.

In the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra, the sage-poet Sri Budha Kousika Rishi specifies the framework by explaining in proper sequence, as it should be. Most stotras and mantras are composed in the sequence of – (a) Rishi = naming the author, e.g. Sri Budha Kousika Rishi, (b) Chanda = specifying the metre of the verse, e.g. Anushtup Chanda, (c) Devatha = identifying the deity, e.g. Sita's Ramachandra, (d) Shakti = explaining the source of strength to the stotra, e.g. Sita, and (e) Keelakam = locating the fulcrum or linchpin, e.g. Hanuman.

The sequence varies in some mantras or stotras, where the *Beejam* (= seed) is also identified. In such prayers, the sequence is – Rishi – Chanda – Devatha – Beejam – Keelakam – Shakti.

In the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra, the deity is Sri Rama, and is established as the *adishtana devatha*, meaning that Sri Rama has been positioned with deliberate thought and purpose. Shiva has placed Sri Rama at the foremost prominence of the stotra, and therefore, Sri Rama as the deity, is given the *aadhi* (= foremost) *sthaan* (= place).

There are other prayers to Sri Rama, as presented by the traveling deity-saint Narada. These are the *Rama Sadakshari* and the *Rama Dasakshari*. The Keelakam is not specified in these prayers. This is the reason for the prominence and reverence given over thousands of years to the Sri Rama Raksha Stotra.

For, how can the devotee dare to step around Hanuman, the *parama bhakt* of Sri Rama? How can the devotee assume that one can succeed where even Bhima could not?

The reverse is also supreme. Shiva explained the Sri Rama Raksha Stotram to Sri Budha Kousika Rishi and the deity has placed Sri Rama as the Keelakam. The roles are reversed in the *Shiva Kavacham* as presented in the *Skanda Purana*. The rishi Rishabha Deva taught the Shiva Kavacham to Bhadraayu.

*Asya Shiva Kavacha Stotra Mahamantrasya
Brahma Rishi, Anushtup Chanda,
Sri Sada Shivo Rudro Devatha, Hreem Shakti,
Ram Keelakam, Sreem, Hreem, Kleem Bheejam,
Sri Sada Shivapreetyarthe,
Shiva Kavacha Stotra Jape Viniyogaha*

The Shiva Kavacham presents the sequence of – (a) Rishi = Brahma, (b) Chanda = Anushtup, (c) Devatha = Sada Shiva Rudra, (d) Shakti = Hreem, (e) Keelakam = Rama, (f) Bheejam = Sreem, Hreem, Kleem. There is another version, wherein the Rishi is Rishabha Yogeeshwara Rishi, Bheejam is 'Om', and Keelakam is 'Shiva'.

The Sri Hanuman Kavacham Stotram is also yet another example of the dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. Upon an enquiry by Parvati – How can people be protected from sorrow? *Kena raksha bhaved dhruvam?* From fear of the dead, the fire of the funeral pyre and sorrow? *Dukha davagni santhaptha...*

Shiva recites, in response, the guidance provided by Rama to Vibheeshana, and specifies that the reciting of the Sri Hanuman Kavacham Stotram would be the only pathway to seek strength and support in times of distress from sorrows that cannot be reversed.

Om Asya Sri Hanuman Kavacha Stotra Maha Mantrasya, Sri Ramachandra Rishi, Sri Hanuman Parmarthma Devatha, Anushtup Chanda, Maruthaatmaja Ithi Bheeja Anjanana Soorithi Sakthi, Lakshmana Prana Ithi Keelakam...

The Keelakam in this stotra is the aspect of giving life to Lakshmana by Hanuman, and the recitation of the Sri Hanuman Kavacha Stotram is to give encouragement and courage to the devotee under duress or sorrow, sometimes due to the loss of a close relative, or the extended distress due to illness.

It is usually advised that the devotee may also direct one's prayers to the Keelakam designated in the stotra with the same reverence that may be indicated to the Adhishtana Devatha. The deity cannot be 'unlocked' without the correct position and use of the fulcrum. The Keelakam will provide better strength and support only if recited and recognized with the correct inclination, as Hanuman, the supreme bhakta of Rama, would never refuse to help a devotee.

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